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Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

I come here to voice my opposition to merging the Office of the Healthcare Advocate with the Department of Consumer Protection.

Sometimes personal experiences need to be told before one can fully appreciate how important it is that Vicky Veltri and her team can continue to provide the quality of support that is so rarely encountered. Largely because of the manner in which they are free to operate independently, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate provides prompt, effective response to those in truly desperate and potentially life threatening situations. There is an amazing lack of bureaucracy and an energetic willingness to truly get involved in finding a solution when constituents find themselves battling their insurance providers.

My 18 year old daughter suffers from Bulimia. It is a terrible condition that is hard for anyone not involved to truly wrap their head around. She binges and purges sometimes several times per day. She entered college after going through intensive outpatient treatment and regular therapy in her senior year of high school. During her first semester she continued therapy both at school and with her therapist at home. During her first semester at college the bulimia worsened and by the end of the first week of her second semester her therapists said she needed immediate placement into residential care. She had spiraled out of control and the situation was critical.

The treatment she received in the Spring of her senior year of high school completely exhausted her LIFETIME benefit for inpatient treatment under my employers health

insurance plan. As a student she was eligible to enroll in insurance through her school which clearly addressed coverage for biologically based mental illness treatment, specifically noting the inclusion of bulimia and after making calls to discuss the coverage I purchased her insurance through the school. Preliminary coverage checks were done by the treatment center she was to enter into and she withdrew from her spring semester for residential treatment in Boston expected to last a month or more. Then she arrived at the center. Five hours of calls to the insurance company for approval of treatment received the response that she had no coverage for such treatment. A bad situation with such promise for recovery quickly turned worse. Now it was 5:00 pm on a Friday and she began the 4 hour trip home.

I contacted Maureen Smith at the Office of the Healthcare Advocate even though it was after hours. Even though Monday was a federal holiday I received contact from her and the process of helping began. Jody Rowell was assigned to help us and in no time she had contacted both the insurance company and the director of the treatment center along with having a discussion with my daughter. The answer came back that the policy does indeed provide coverage and she is continuing to work on getting the approval necessary for my daughter to begin to get well.

I have never experienced people so dedicated to providing the kind of help that truly changes the course of lives. It is crucial that they be left to continue their work in the manner that they have established themselves to be able to. Between the manner in which they are funded and the independence from other state agencies that they operate under, they provide a service that should not be diluted by the proposed changes.

I thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Michael Lombardi